GS Misc 281

General Synod

THE LITURGICAL MINISTRY OF DEACONS

A Report by the Liturgical Commission

A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

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INTRODUCTION

1 With the growing awareness that serving God's world is central to the Church's mission has developed a need to express this in liturgical terms: the Church's ministry and liturgy has become more diaconal in character.

2 At the same time, the indifference shown by the world, combined with the secularisation of many of the Church's traditional diaconal roles such as education, health care and social work, has turned the Church in on itself: many Church people feel more secure doing 'churchy' things.

3 A corollary of this is the clericalisation of ministries, with singers and those licensed to administer Holy Communion (as well as Readers) robed and occupying a designated place in the assembly which looks as if it has more to do with status than with function, let alone order. This has not helped us to be clear about what is an appropriate liturgical ministry for those in the Order of Deacons.

4 The Order of Deacons exists to focus the Church's diaconal vocation, which is to embody Christ's serving ministry in word and deed. As the Ordination of Deacons (ASB p344) makes clear, "a Deacon is called to serve the Church of God, and to work with its members in caring for the poor, the needy, the sick and all who are in trouble." Any liturgical ministry a deacon performs must make this clear, and needs to grow out of, and be rooted in, a dedicated life of service: deacons must practise what they preach.

5 A factor which confuses the position is that some still understand the diaconate not as a full and distinct order but as a priesthood manqué. Some deacons are not concerned to explore the nature of diaconal ministry so much as to do everything they legally can of what a priest does, ignoring the riches of their distinctive vocations and their complementary nature in the liturgical assembly. It must be emphasised that the notes which follow are guidelines for deacons seeking to exercise a genuinely diaconal ministry, not permissive regulations for would-be priests.

6 These guidelines do not reflect exhaustively the diversity of practice in tradition: there are other ways in which diaconal ministry has been and could be expressed. But these guidelines are offered as a coherent rationale in the hope that they will stimulate a process of exploration and development as the Church learns to value a distinctively diaconal contribution to its life and worship.

7 Within these guidelines, careful thought needs to be given to the manner in whch what is identified as diaconal ministry is actually exercised.

(a) When ordained deacons are present, they will naturally be the focus of such ministry. But this does not imply an exclusive role: the deacon's ministry is to enable the offering of worship and to order it, not to stifle it. In some parishes where there is no deacon, lay people have taken and will continue to take substantial diaconal roles. It is hoped that these guidelines will enable their contribution to the liturgical celebration to take an appropriate form.

(b) There will be other occasions when the diaconal role is performed by a priest, exercising his diaconate rather than his priesthood. This may be expressed not only in what he does, but how he is vested. A particular example is the way in which an archdeacon may exercise a primary diaconal role at a liturgy where the bishop presides, for example, at an Ordination, an Institution and Induction, or a diocesan event. Bishops, too - who hold together and focus the whole ministry of the Church - may exercise a specifically diaconal function from time to time, (and it is good that they should be seen to do so) as when, for example, in obedience to Jesus's command (John 13:14) they wash the feet of the people on Maundy Thursday evening.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES

8 Many of the models of the Church and its ministry are structural and salvationist: the Ark, with its ministry of rescue; the Temple, contrasted with the Tabernacle, with its exclusive structure; the sacrificial priesthood, offering sacrifices on behalf of, or instead of, the people. These are images of distance, drawn from the Old Testament, and it is so often these which are evident as the norms for the life of the Church or the priesthood. But Christ's incarnate ministry stresses that gracious movement from God to man (John 1:14); the abandonment of status and structure (Philippians 2: 7); 'I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:27). And the movement is not one way: Christ shared our poverty that we might share his riches (2 Corinthians 8:9) and the same Christ who humbled himself, God has exalted (Philippians 2:9).

9 At the heart of diaconal ministry of humble service is a sense of dynamic movement between God and man, a movement which reaches down to our level, draws us out of ourselves, and leads us to the Father. This is given liturgical expression in the way in which the deacon is closely identified with helping the assembly to offer their worship in response to God's generous self-giving, expressed in the declaratory ministry of the presiding celebrant. While it is not impossible for the president both to lead the act of worship and to order the assembly's response, it requires us to recognise that each part of that dual function needs a distinctive form of expression. The president's relationship with the assembly is of a different kind to the deacon's: it is hard to preside over the Eucharistic Prayer with dignity if you have to give out page numbers or organise a procession of gifts to the altar.

10 A diaconal ministry, therefore, which enables response and so initiates movement, is complementary to the priestly one; and the basic diaconal functions of eliciting prayer, explaining the rite, giving instructions to stand, to pray, to kneel, ordering movement - whether of candidates to the president for baptism or of the bearers of gifts to the altar or of the people to receive the Holy Communion - in short, all that helps the assembly to respond to what God has graciously done in Christ with understanding and self-giving is the proper function of the deacon.

11 Nor should we forget the deacon's final words in the eucharistic liturgy: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. The same deacon who proclaims the Gospel not only draws from the assembly their response in worship but also sends each one forth to live it out in the wider community as well as in the life of the Church. Here too the deacon must be a doer of the Word, a living sign of what

has been proclaimed: the deacon's liturgical ministry must reflect and grow out of his or her ministry in the whole of life. The deacon is a practical servant in caring for those who are sick, in supporting the faithful, and in searching out the careless and indifferent. Thus the deacon occupies a frontier-post, making sense of terms like work-based ministry, for the deacon is ordained for ministry in Church and world and is a sign that the two cannot be polarised. This provides a contrast with the priest's ministry which is bound to be - where the priest is focus and leader of the whole liturgical and organisational life of the local cell of the Church - more Church-centred. Distinctive diaconal ministry by contrast has its natural roots in ministry in the wider community.

12 This tradition, of the deacon as the assembly's guide and mentor who elicits and embodies their response, derives from a theology of the diaconate which has retained clearer liturgical expression in the Orthodox tradition than in the western rite, where the loss of the diaconate as a distinctive and equal order, and its relegation to a probationary step in a hierarchical progression, weakened its distinctive liturgical contribution. While it would be an exaggeration to say that it was the loss of the distinctive diaconate which led the western Church to experience such a gulf between the people of God and the ordained priesthood, the survival of diaconal ministry primarily in terms of assistance to the president neither made explicit that go-between role, nor enabled worship to reflect that dialogue between God and man and the consequent movement or turning of man to God which is at the heart of the Christian experience of coming before God in worship.

13 So while diaconal service to the president of the rite must not be excluded, the traditional 'western rite' expression of diaconal ministry is much modified in these guidelines by the continuing orthodox tradition, seeking to link the leadership of the president with the response of the whole assembly.

14 We may summarise these general principles as follows:

(1) The deacon is primarily the servant of the assembly, focussing the servant ministry of the whole Church, and enabling the assembly to be united in the celebration. The deacon is not merely an assistant to the president.

(2) The deacon is 'Among you as one who serves'. The incarnational nature of Christ's ministry among his people is best expresed when the deacon is (where the physical arrangements of the Church permit) among the worshipping community, and speaking for them, rather than in an elevated place and speaking at them. The deacon in the Orthodox tradition, who comes frequently among the people to lead their litanies, is as important a model as the deacon who is one of the 'Three Sacred Ministers' (in the terminology of the Tridentine High Mass) in the sanctuary.

(3) If the distinctive ministry of the Deacon is recognised, the President is freed from a confusing multiplicity of roles and functions: of having to represent both local particularity and universal detachment, both the immediate incarnational concerns and the broader perspectives of the Kingdom which are difficult to balance. In the Eucharist, the local and the immediate needs of God's people meet the universal and timeless challenge of

his Gospel, represented by the apostolic authority delegated to the president by the bishop. Deacons are at the point of appropriation and interchange, and symbolise in their movement between the people and the altar the union of the whole worshipping community: the deacon is the go-between.

THE EUCHARIST

15 Before the Service

(1) The deacon needs to be available to the people as they arrive, to listen to what needs and prayers are in their hearts so that the Intercessions may be shaped appropriately when the time comes. The deacon also ensures their preparedness before the worship begins. If notices and instructions must be given out, and if before worship is considered more appropriate than at the end, this will be a diaconal function, though the deacon may well share some of these tasks with the churchwardens and sidesmen.

(2) The deacon continues this close relationship with the assembly by giving linking instructions throughout the rite: the invitation to Confession; when to kneel or stand; 'Let us offer one another a sign of peace'; 'Go in the peace of Christ', etc.

(3) The deacon is traditionally responsible for the care and preparation of the vessels and the Holy Table. The Holy Table should be clear at the start of the Eucharist.

16 The Preparation, the Ministry of the Word and Prayers

(1) The deacon brings in the book of the Gospels.

The deacon enters with the book - this may be the Bible or a large ASB - immediately before the president, and it is this Gospel Book which is the focus of the first part of the service. The Eucharist starts as the Word of God comes among the people of God. The Gospel Book is placed on the Holy Table or on the lectern.

(2) The deacon reads the Gospel.

This tradition emphasises the deacon's ministry as an interpreter to the people, equipping them for their ministry and apostolic mission. That is why a procession with the deacon carrying the Gospel book to the body of the church may be appropriate. When the Greek of the Gospels was no longer the vernacular, it was the deacon's role to provide a 'simultaneous translation' for the people. The deacon, at the invitation of the president, may be asked to develop this 'translation' by preaching.

(3) The deacon orders the Prayers of Intercesion.

These prayers for the Church and world, traditionally introduced and concluded by the president, are the liturgical expression of the assembly's response to the Gospel. The deacon is told in the Ordination charge to spearhead the work of caring for the poor, the needy and the sick, strengthening the faithful and searching out the careless and indifferent. The Prayers of Intercession

reflect this concern for the needy in God's world. When many individuals contribute to the Prayers of the People, the deacon is responsible for giving the prayers shape and ordering the individual contributions so that they are a coherent and corporate response in prayer to the preaching of the Gospel. No deacon can pray the people's prayers unless they are in regular pastoral contact with the people.

17 The Ministry of the Sacrament

(1) At the Peace, the deacon may say 'Let us offer one another a sign of peace' It is specially appropriate for the deacon to move among the people.

(2) The deacon prepares the Gifts.

Deacons, from their place among the people, supervise the bringing of the gifts to the Holy Table. The president may receive them and give thanks to God for His gifts, but it is the deacon who spreads the corporal and fills the vessels with sufficient bread and wine for the celebration. Only when they are prepared does the president move to the Holy Table to take the bread and wine.

(3) The deacon assists the president at the Holy Table.

The deacon stands by the president, and may assist him with the book, giving instructions, like 'Let us proclaim the mystery of Faith', which may introduce the Acclamations, and may assist by raising the chalice at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer.

(4) The deacon assists with the distribution of Holy Communion.

If the president distributes the Holy Communion, the deacon follows him with the cup. However, the deacon may distribute Communion in either kind, and normally receives Communion from the president at the start of the distribution.

(5) The deacon supervises the Ablutions.

The deacon supervises the consumption of what remains of the consecrated bread and wine (except for what may be reserved), the cleansing of the vessels, and tidies the Holy Table. After the Celebration, the deacon will be among those who take Communion to the sick and housebound.

(6) The deacon dismisses the assembly.*

The deacon may give brief notices or instructions before dismissing the assembly. Dismissing the assembly is not only a practical instruction, but an exhortation to live out Christ's ministry of service in which the assembly has just been renewed: 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'. This dismissal follows the blessing and is the final act of the rite.

* The rubric in ASB Rite A indicates that the president should say the Dismissal. But under Note 2 (p115) the Dismissal is not one of the parts assigned to the president which he may not delegate to others.

INITIATION SERVICES

18 'They may baptise when required to do so'. Ordination of Deacons (ASB p344).
'May' does not imply 'should' or 'must': any person, even a professed non-Christian may baptise when there is no one else.

19 The rubrics for Baptism in the ASB (p241) make it clear that Holy Baptism is normally administered by the parish priest. Similarly, the minister who presides over the whole rite of Baptism and Confirmation is the bishop, though he may choose to delegate certain parts of the service, except the Confirmation proper, to others. These guidelines again are concerned with the appropriate part a deacon should play in the rite.

20 The ministry of the deacon in Initiation is to 'Search out the careless and the indifferent' and bring them to Christ: the emphasis in Initiation is on movement - on changing direction and turning to Christ. The priest (delegated by the bishop) represents and focuses that towards which the candidate turns. The deacon, like the sponsors and godparents, is a companion for the candidate on the way, rather than a representative of tradition - that which is to be handed on. The deacon will therefore introduce and present candidates.

21 Historically, deacons (male and female) assisted at Baptism by looking after the candidates, going down into the water with them, and then by clothing them. This is comparable to the sheepdog role which has remained with archdeacons at Ordinations, looking after and presenting the candidates and vesting them.

22 Normally, therefore, the proper ministry of a deacon in the Rite of Baptism (and Confirmation) will be:

(a) At Baptism

(i) The deacon brings the candidate to the bishop (or priest) for the Decision. The preliminary Questions of Decision may be delegated to the deacon by the bishop (priest), but it is the bishop (priest) who receives that decision by making the sign of the Cross and saying the Prayer of Deliverance.

(ii) The deacon brings the candidates to the font for Baptism, where, after blessing the waters of Baptism, the bishop (priest) asks the Questions of Faith and baptises the candidates (though the deacon may assist him in the administration of Baptism where there are several candidates).

(iii) The deacon clothes the candidates after Baptism, where Baptism has been by immersion, or where it is the custom to indicate this symbolically by placing a white robe around the candidate. The deacon gives the lighted candle as a reminder to the newly-baptised to exercise their ministry in Christ's service with the use of the words: 'Receive this light'. (The words 'This is to show that you have passed from darkness to light . . ." are more appropriately said by the presiding minister.)

(b) At Confirmation

(i) The deacon presents the candidates to the bishop, (by name), and assists them in coming before him.

(ii) The distinctive function of priests at Confirmation is to stand with the bishop, joining silently with him in prayer for the candidates. Where a deacon is present, the priest should not present the candidates.

23 When parts of the service are specifically delegated to the deacon as, for example, asking the Questions of Decision or going into the water with an adult candidate who is to be baptised by immersion, that should clearly be done under the presidency of the bishop or priest, who remains president of the whole rite, receiving the candidate's Decision and asking the Questions of Profession and Faith.

THE ORDINAL

24 At the Ordination of deacons, it is appropriate for one already in deacons' Orders to read the Gospel. None of the candidates should, since they are not yet ordained.

25 At the Peace, it may be appropriate for some kind of welcome to the Order to be given to the newly-ordained deacons by those in their Order who are present.

26 As 'It is appropriate that the newly-ordained should be invited by the bishop to exercise their new ministry in the course of the service' (ASB p338 note 4), opportunity should be provided for the newly-ordained deacons to:

(a) Supervise the bringing of the gifts to the Holy Table.

(b) Prepare the gifts on the Holy Table, where some of the vessels will be primed.

(c) Assist the bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer.

d) Assist in the distribution of the consecrated bread and wine.

The supervision of the Ablutions may be, on this occasion, more suitably undertaken by others: the newly ordained deacons should have returned to their places for the concluding prayer, blessing and dismissal.

27 At an Ordination, such instructions as:
'Let us offer one another a sign of peace'
'Go in the peace of Christ'
together with the supervision of the newly-ordained in the exercise of their ministry may most suitably be undertaken by archdeacons, who are responsible for shepherding and presenting the candidates and clothing them in their new vesture, as deacons do for candidates for Baptism.

28 If an Ordination of Priests has been preceded by an Ordination of Deacons, then it may be suitable for a newly-ordained deacon to read the Gospel on that occasion. If not, a deacon who is a candidate for Ordination to the priesthood would be appropriate.

29 The newly-ordained priests should <u>not</u> assist in the Preparation of the Gifts but may be invited 'to exercise their new ministry in the course of the service' by concelebrating with the bishop. It is not necessarily appropriate for them to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion. That, together with the Preparation of the Gifts at the Holy Table and the supervision of the Ablutions, remains primarily a diaconal function.

MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER

30 Morning and Evening Prayer may be led by a deacon. In view of the incarnational nature of the key Gospel Canticles at Morning, Evening and Night Prayers (the Benedictus, the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis) this is especially appropriate.

31 In communities where a college of clergy say the Office together, it may be appropriate for the presiding minister to begin the Office with a Greeting or Acclamation, giving the Absolution (if a priest) when a penitential rite is included, and to conclude the Office with the Collect and the Blessing.

32 The Blessing of Light has traditionally been a diaconal function, as in the singing of the Exultet at the Easter Vigil. When a Service of Light or Lucernarion precedes Evening Prayer, it is appropriate for the deacon who has had the practical task of lighting the lamp to give thanks to God who lightens the darkness of this age.

33 Such blessings are analgous to the Jewish Blessings of God which accompany everyday domestic and practical acts, enabling them to be recognised as moments when something of the divine nature is disclosed.

34 By analogy, such acclamations of God's blessedness for his gifts might properly be extended into other areas, and a distinctively diaconal style allowed to emerge. This would be characterised by a style of prayer closer to an Acclamation, praising God for his particular gifts (of light, health, holiness, marriage, creation, etc) and so gathering up the worship of the community in expectation of his gracious activity, rather than by a prayer which seeks to direct God's gifts of power and blessing towards particular people, relationships or objects.

MARRIAGE

35 As an ordained minister of the Church of England, it is legally possible for a deacon to solemnise a marriage. A deacon does this, not as part of the exercise of diaconal ministry, but in the absence of an ordinary minister (bishop or priest). Where this is necessary, the archbishops have issued regulations as to how a deacon may conduct the Marriage Service.

36 In the ASB, an acclamatory blessing, celebrating what the bride and groom as ministers of the rite have done, is dispersed in sections 20 and 35. (See para 32 on the Blessing of Light above).

37 When a deacon is present at a marriage solemnised by a bishop or priest, the deacon assists the congregation with the Readings, the Prayers and by giving instructions; the deacon assists the priest according to need.

38 If there is a celebration of the Eucharist, the deacon assists as normal.

MINISTRY TO THE SICK

39 A deacon will be a regular minister of Holy Communion to those not able to be present at the celebration of the Eucharist (Ministry to the Sick pp19 - 26).

40 A deacon may preside over the Ministry of Laying On Of Hands (Ministry to the Sick p27 note 7) in any service other than the Eucharist.

41 The priest or bishop who presides at the Eucharist 'may delegate the ministry of anointing to other lawful ministers'. Anointing the sick with oil blessed by the bishop is a permissive delegation 'in cases of urgency', not a normal part of diaconal ministry.

FUNERAL SERVICES

42 A deacon may conduct a Funeral Service (other than a celebration of the Eucharist).

43 When a deacon is present at a funeral where the presiding minister is a bishop or priest, then the deacon may assist the congregation by leading their response, by the Readings (especially the Gospel) and by the Prayers. The deacon does not read the opening Sentence or Collect, and does not lead the Commendation and Conclusion.

44 If there is a celebration of the Eucharist, the deacon assists as normal.

VESTURE

45 Historically, the distinctive garment of the deacon is the dalmatic - a closely fitting tunic with sleeves contrasting with the tentlike chasuble of the priest.

46 Whether the dalmatic is worn or not a fitted alb, rather than a flowing surplice with full sleeves, is more likely to give the impression that the deacon is dressed for work and ready to serve.

47 The deacon wears the stole over the left shoulder and tied firmly at the waist under the right arm. Some deacons are exploring a distinctive diaconal stole, which draws its inspiration more from the eastern Orthodox tradition. (It is ironic that the maniple - in origin a folded towel and the most obviously symbolic of the traditional vestments - should have fallen into disuse just when the diaconate was being revived.)

48 In parishes where eucharistic vestments are not worn, the deacon will wear hood and scarf. In this vesture there is no distinctive style for a deacon: the scarf is never tied as if it were a stole.

+ COLIN WINTON
Chairman

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